

Pennsylvania Outdoors

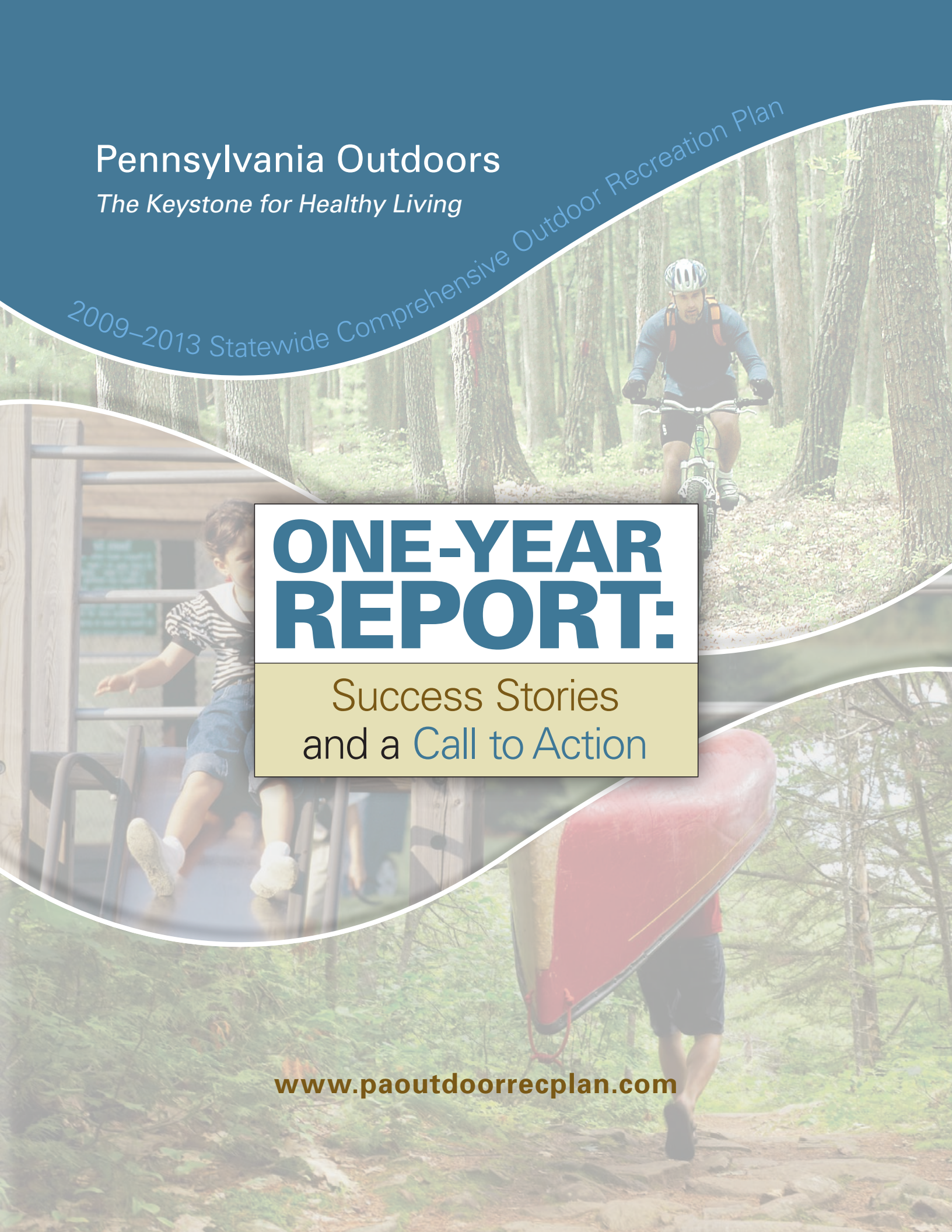
The Keystone for Healthy Living

2009–2013 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

ONE-YEAR REPORT:

Success Stories
and a Call to Action

www.paoutdoorrecplan.com



Introduction

One-Year Anniversary Report

The 2009-2013 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan *Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living* was released by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources one year ago. Developed with extensive input from citizens and experts of the Commonwealth, it is an inspiring and practical guide for working together to nurture our lands and lives.

The roots of the Plan go back to March 2007, when the Commonwealth convened the Governor's Conference on the Outdoors to open dialogue on the state of outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania. Leaders in conservation, recreation, health, education and nutrition worked together to investigate and report findings. The result was the 2008 *Governor's Outdoor Task Force*

Report. Today, *Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living* represents an effort to refine recommendations and develop programs to satisfy the call of the Governor's Outdoor Task Force Report, and to build upon the findings of other relevant and timely research and planning efforts. The plan is a five-year guide toward meeting the recreational needs of the Commonwealth.

Four original research efforts were conducted for the plan. A Resident Survey of citizens across Pennsylvania revealed opinions on preferred types of and places to recreate, preferred facilities, and on influential factors such as expense and time constraints. The State Park Visitor Survey conducted interviews with park visitors at six geographi-

cally dispersed state parks. A Trail Gap Study requested data from major trail organizations in the state to identify critical gaps and the key issues facing trail development. Facilitated discussions were held across the Commonwealth with groups representing both the Baby Boomer generation and urban youth.

Research findings from these and other studies, plans and reports helped to develop the resulting plan recommendations and actions steps, along with extensive engagement of the public, recreation experts and stakeholders. The 28 programmatic and five funding action steps are organized thematically under four major goals:

- Strengthen connections between outdoor recreation, healthy lifestyles and economic benefits in communities;
- Reconnect people to the outdoors and develop a stewardship ethic through outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences;
- Develop a statewide land and water trail network to facilitate recreation, transportation and healthy lifestyles;
- Enhance outdoor recreation through better state agency cooperation.

This first annual report showcases some exceptional work already being done to enhance outdoor recreation across Pennsylvania. It also focuses on areas still in need of action. We must continue working with the wisdom and haste we were charged with to meet the goals of this statewide five-year plan.



SUCCESS STORIES

GOAL 1:

Strengthen Connections Between Outdoor Recreation, Healthy Lifestyles and Economic Benefits in Communities

PennDOT's Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative



Smart Transportation is partnering to build great communities for future generations of Pennsylvanians by linking transportation investments and land use planning and decision making. In order to advance transportation projects that demonstrate Smart Transportation Principles, PennDOT created the Pennsylvania Community

Transportation Initiative and set aside \$60 million in the 2009-2012 Transportation Improvement Program. Out of the 400 applications received, PennDOT selected 50 projects that best exemplified the Smart Transportation Principles. Some of the goals of the selected projects were to support local economic development; encourage walk-able, multi-modal, mixed use corridors; enhance the existing transportation network; and improve connectivity.

PennDOT worked collaboratively with DCNR in advancing projects that were of interest to both agencies. Examples of these projects include: the Brandywine Creek Trail Feasibility Study in Chester County, the Lehigh Riverfront Development Plan in Lehigh Valley, the Pine Creek Rail Trail/Jersey Shore Trail Connector Project in Lycoming County and the Lewisburg Area Recreation Authority Rail Trail Project in Union County. Because of the success of these community-based transportation projects, PennDOT set aside additional funding in the 2011-2014 TIP to advance more projects that display Smart Transportation Principles in Round 2 of the PCTI program.

Pennsylvania Department of Health Helps Launch WalkWorks

To increase opportunities for physical activity, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Public Health Practice, will implement a pilot community walking initiative, WalkWorks, in 2011. The WalkWorks initiative, supported through a federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant, will create a series of fun,



community-based walking routes to promote walking groups and sustainable physical activity through the built environment, social supports and healthy lifestyle behaviors. Walking groups will be implemented to promote physical activity in six western Pennsylvania counties: Washington, Greene, Cambria, Crawford, Venango and McKean. The Department of Health will also promote policy change to support the built environment and encourage physical activity. These strategies will lay the foundation in Pennsylvania to promote ongoing policy discussion around the benefits of physical activity.



GOAL 1 SUCCESS STORIES *continued*

Economic Value of Open Space Captured in Newly Published Report

GreenSpace Alliance (GSA), in partnership with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, commissioned a study of the economic value of open space in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Funding for the study came from DCNR and The Lenfest Foundation. With the steady loss of funding for conservation projects, the GSA board felt it was imperative to work toward the goal of creating a network of protected lands by making a clear and compelling case that protection of natural, recreational, and agricultural lands is a sound and strategic



investment in our region's economic prosperity. Board members proposed that results of the study would be used to raise public, political, and financial support for preserving more open space by reframing the dialogue about open space as a benefit, not just an expense.

The study consultants — Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, Econsult Corporation, and Keystone Conservation Trust — used SCORP survey data as the basis for the recreation and health care cost savings portion of the study. The report was released on November 16, 2010 and has received a great amount of press coverage and is turning up in web blogs. With funding from Claneil Foundation and Pat Mascaro & Sons, GSA hired a media consulting firm to develop and help implement a communications and outreach plan throughout 2011. To view the report, go to:

www.greenspacealliance.org/home/economic-value.asp



OPEN SPACE CREATES JOBS AND ATTRACTS PEOPLE WHO SPEND IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

- Economic activity associated with protected open space in southeastern Pennsylvania results in more than **6,900** jobs and **\$299 million** in annual earnings.
- Total annual expenditures in the five-county region associated with protected open space equal **\$566 million**. Specifically **\$174 million**, or **31%**, is attributable to spending associated with the management and maintenance of publicly protected open space; **\$206 million**, or **36%**, accounts for agricultural sales associated with preserved farmland; and **\$187 million**, or **33%**, is generated through tourist activity associated with protected open space.
- Agricultural jobs associated with protected farmland make up **45%** of employment related to protected open space in southeastern Pennsylvania, totaling **3,100** jobs.
- Economic activity associated with protected open space generates **\$30 million** per year in state and local tax revenue.

SUCCESS STORIES

GOAL 2:

Reconnect People to the Outdoors and Develop a Stewardship Ethic Through Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Experiences

Liberty Lands Park, Philadelphia: Green and Playful Neighborhood Park

Liberty Lands is a two-acre public park in a densely-developed former industrial neighborhood just north of Center City. Near the Delaware River, the area is attracting artists, young professionals and “green” developers. Years of advocacy and fund-raising by the community and help from the City of Philadelphia Brownfields Office created the park, now owned by the Northern Liberties Neighbors Association and maintained by the park’s friends group.

The park was created to both strengthen the community and offer an environmentally sound remedy to stormwater problems on surrounding streets. The former brownfield was transformed into a green community gathering space complete with children’s playgrounds – both structured and natural – 37 garden plots, local artwork, grassy amphitheater and new festival stage, ADA



accessible walkways, a butterfly garden and a Native American herb garden all available for community use.

This project is advancing many SCORP recommendations at once:

- Successful redevelopment of a former brownfield: The cleared site (1996) previously housed a vacant industrial building.
- Promote alternative transportation: A short walk for most residents, the park is accessible by rail, bus, car, or bicycle and only blocks from the Delaware River, where a waterfront greenway is planned.
- Create livable communities: Liberty Lands Park is part of an overall neighborhood revitalization plan to provide accessible green infrastructure and community-centered open space as an integral part of development practices.
- Promote green buildings and sites: Projects included naturalized ADA access, a new stage using recycled plastic lumber, three man-made rain gardens and other unique storm water management features.
- Get everyone outdoors: The site now provides community programming, including a summer movie series, music festivals, and a place for children’s parties.

GOAL 2 SUCCESS STORIES *continued*

PennDOT and PANA Partnership Provides Safe Routes to School

October 2010 marked the end of a three-year contract that PennDOT established with the Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity (PANA) to administer the non-infrastructure side of the Safe Routes to School program. PANA provided general non-infrastructure support to schools and municipalities and awarded non-infrastructure grants of \$5,000 to 40 Pennsylvania schools through a competitive application process. Schools used the funding for activities and items such as bike assemblies, bike rodeos, walking programs, classroom lesson plans and other items that educate students and encourage the safe use of walking and bicycling routes. These mini grants have positively impacted over 20,000 students in Pennsylvania.

An improvement project for Utica Elementary School in Venango County signifies the first Federal Safe Routes to School infrastructure project to be built in Pennsylvania. Utica was awarded \$385,300 in 2009 to build sidewalks and curb ramps leading to the small, community-based school.



This project was implemented quickly for several reasons:

1. No right-of-way acquisition was required
2. No utilities were affected
3. No environmental or cultural resources were impacted
4. The sponsor provided an accurate project scope, design and cost estimate
5. PennDOT District 1-0 staff worked expeditiously to implement the project



Youngsville Police Chief Todd Mineweaser adjusts Elementary School first-grader's helmet during a bicycle safety rodeo. (*Times Observer photo by Brian Ferry*)

According to the school's principal, the project has been a great benefit to Utica's students, including a student with disabilities who now commutes to and from school – via wheelchair – thanks to the access afforded by the new sidewalks and curb ramps.



Safe Routes to School addresses a number of action steps found in the Plan that work toward both Goals 1 and 2, which encourage such programs to get children involved in outdoor activities and specifically by holding workshops supporting demonstration communities, and providing continued funding for needed improvements.

GOAL 2 SUCCESS STORIES *continued*



Outdoor Recreation Advocates Unite

Advocates of outdoor recreation came together for a major conference at the end of 2010 to share information, lesson plans, techniques, and to celebrate on-the-ground accomplishments. Four Pennsylvania universities — East Stroudsburg, Ursinus, West Chester,



and Slippery Rock — as well as schools across Pennsylvania, including Elk Lake High School, Peters Township High School, Northern Lebanon High School, and Early Childhood Programs at Slippery Rock, were recognized for their contributions to outdoor recreation and

learning. Conference leaders also collected videos, photos, and lesson plans, available at www.psahperd.org/, documenting environmental and physical activity projects including kayaking, canoeing, rock climbing, biking, fly-fishing, geocaching, golfing, hiking, snowshoeing, and experiential learning activities.



Participants shared lessons and project information on campus organic gardening, recycling programs, campus clean-ups, and adopting a community block next to a public park to create safe and healthy places for children to play. Common activities showcased by participants included reducing, reusing, and recycling resources; Leave No Trace programs; energy savings; waste reduction; park and trail stewardship; water conservation; and wildlife awareness.

SUCCESS STORIES

GOAL 3:

Develop a Statewide Land and Water Trail Network to Facilitate Recreation, Transportation and Healthy Lifestyles



Finally!! A One-Stop Pennsylvania Trails Website: <http://www.explorepatrails.com>

In late September 2010, on the one-year anniversary of the launch of ExplorePAtrails.com, DCNR released a complete make-over of the one-stop trails website. New graphics, changeable to reflect the current season, give



the site a clean, updated look and feel. Users can view photos uploaded to the site by other users, and a “print view” enhancement was added enabling users to create a printable map of any specific trail area of interest. In addition, the main home page can now accommodate ad space for trails events and other dynamic content; and DCNR is well on its way to reaching its goal of 10,000 miles of trails published to ExplorePAtrails.com by 2011. As the website continues to expand and improve, its success is evident with up to a thousand users a day visiting [ExplorePAtrails.com](http://www.explorepatrails.com).

This project has brought to fruition the Plan’s recommendation to launch a one-stop trail information interactive website and continue website enhancements.

Real Strides Made in Water Trail Work

By 2010, Pennsylvania was already a national leader in recognized water trails, with 20 trails and counting, for a total of almost 2,000 river miles. In October 2010, the Pennsylvania Water Trail Partnership urged the House Tourism and Development Committee to pass House Resolution 884, which would direct the House Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study the economic impact of recreational water trails on local communities in Pennsylvania.



The Chairman of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee further expressed interest in pursuing a much broader economic impact study of fishing and boating in Pennsylvania. The resolution was adopted by the House, but did not obtain final approval before the 2010 session ended.

In a related effort, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), and PennDOT have been working to coordinate infrastructure support for water trails. PFBC recently released its new fishing and boating access strategy identifying more than 300 new or upgradable access sites statewide and a collaborative process to prioritize and implement these projects. That strategy may be accessed at <http://www.fish.state.pa.us/accessplan.htm>. DCNR and PennDOT have been working to build or maintain river access during bridge replacements, and develop overhead signage on state bridges to help orient water trail users.

Two technical assistance workshops for water trail managers were held to share information and best prac-

GOAL 3 SUCCESS STORIES *continued*

tices on water trail issues. The first workshop, held in the summer of 2009, focused on management and stewardship of water trails and access sites. The second workshop, offered in December 2010, focused on planning, permitting, funding and developing boat access. Future technical assistance workshops will focus on priorities identified in a survey of water trail managers.



PFBC is currently updating its printed regional fishing and boating maps to highlight each region's water trails. The maps will be presented in a larger regional format, which will allow for more emphasis on each region's water trails and boating safety. In order to ensure accuracy and maintain consistency, all water trail access data will be collected and maintained through the use of GIS. The data will be used to produce the regional fishing and boating maps, as well as maintain the interactive maps on the Commission's website. The data will also be used to identify gaps and needs for water and land trail planning efforts as the Commission continues to implement the Pennsylvania Fishing and Boating Access Strategy.

Gateway Arts Projects Enhance River Trail

The Kiskiminetas River was once among the most polluted in the state. But thanks to the work of environmental partners, the river has made a remarkable comeback and is now an active water trail, with communities along the river hosting canoe and kayak launch events. But there has also been a physical and emotional disconnect between the towns and the river, as well as a need for more welcoming and attractive entrances.



Allegheny Ridge Corporation partnered with the Freeport/Leechburg/Apollo Group, a regional Main Street Program in western Armstrong County, to help weave outdoor recreation, heritage interpretation, and natural resource conservation into the fabric of the regional revitalization process. Gateway art pieces were designed through a Gateway Communities Initiative Planning Workshop funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Conservation Fund. More than 30 community members worked with professional artists via the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Arts Path Program. By June 2010, art pieces were installed in Freeport and Apollo.



SUCCESS STORIES

GOAL 4:

Enhance Outdoor Recreation Through Better State Agency Cooperation

Greening Our Grants Programs

The first recommendation under Goal 4 is to develop a set of green principles for state grant programs. The idea is that agencies should showcase and promote best green practices by prioritizing the projects that incorporate them for funding. DCNR's Green and Sustainable Parks Initiative provides technical assistance and outreach to help applicants know what green practices are out there, and how they can use them in their project designs and development.

DCNR began with a set of 10 best practices for project design including: better groundwater infiltration; use of buffers to protect wetlands and streams; more trees; planting natives; improving walkability to the site and within the site; and minimizing costly and unnecessary maintenance. DCNR staff created a scorecard to help applicants figure out how "green" their project designs were and how they could improve. Finally, DCNR has developed a Green Parks Award to motivate more local park and recreation groups to incorporate green practices. For more information on this initiative and future plans, go to www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants/indexgreen.aspx.

Columbia Borough Riverfront Park — Lancaster County

In 2006, Columbia Borough completed a riverfront master site plan to rehabilitate Riverfront Park and its access to the Susquehanna River. The first phase was completed in July 2010, included expanding an antiquated boat launch, a new canoe and kayak access area, parking, ADA accessible fishing pier, pedestrian walkways, utilities, rain gardens, signage and landscaping.

This highly collaborative project was supported by four state agencies. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources brought the Borough and agency representatives together to discuss each agency's funding

options, timelines, match requirements, and eligible project components. DCNR provided funding for site amenities, parking, landscaping, and walkways. The Fish and Boat Commission provided funding for the fishing pier and canoe/kayak launch. The Department of Environmental Protection covered the costs of stormwater management, rain gardens, and other site improvements. Lancaster County covered design costs.



This project addresses many of the Plan's recommendations. It supports other revitalization projects designed to protect Columbia Borough's historic legacy and make its neighborhoods walkable, connected, accessible and safe. As it is integrated with existing/planned transportation, the project supports infill and "greenfield" development. It is accessible by walking and biking through sidewalk connections from downtown Columbia and the future Lancaster County River Trail. The Riverfront Park enhancement project promotes healthy lifestyles through creating additional recreation opportunities, like public kayak/canoe launches and fishing docks.

A CALL TO ACTION

Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone For Healthy Living **2009-2013 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**

At year one of a five-year plan, it's not surprising to have plenty of unfinished business. What is surprising is how much has actually been accomplished since the November 2009 publication of *Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living*. As this one-year report summary illustrates, early successes and tangible accomplishments are happening with the help of many recreation organizations, and state and local agencies. It's important to recognize and celebrate all of our successes so far.

Recreation plans, however, are only as good as the extent to which they are implemented. There are four main goals, 28 recommendations, and a whopping 98 action steps outlined in the Plan. Obviously this is a tall order, and not likely to be accomplished overnight. Some recommendations are easier than others. Some involve long-term horizons where success may be defined by the action of bringing opposing parties together and opening dialogue, not necessarily resolving a long-standing impasse.

The DCNR writing team evaluated what has been accomplished so far, and reviewed the four goals to see what's left to do. The team has highlighted some of the actions underway and completed, as well as some not yet finished, in hopes of inspiring groups or individuals to take on the tasks at hand.



Goal 1: Strengthening Connections between Outdoor Recreation, Healthy Lifestyles and Economic Benefits in Communities has nine recommendations and 27 accompanying action steps.

Progress has been made on many action steps. A TAC Health sub-committee has been formed and met quarterly in 2010 to help advance three action steps: 1) develop an active/healthy/green community designation; 2) expand Get Outdoors PA as Pennsylvania's statewide campaign to promote healthy recreation in the outdoors; and 3) begin work on conducting a health summit in spring 2011 to explore ways to connect the health provider network and outdoor recreation. PennDOT continues to coordinate with other state agencies on its progressive Smart Transportation Initiative by identifying lessons learned and capturing case studies on this website: <http://www.smart-transportation.com/>. In partnership with numerous organizations, the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association launched in January 2010 a one-stop conservation tools website. (Visit <http://conservationtools.org/>.) Considerable progress has been made in researching the economic benefits of outdoor recreation. DCNR created a web page: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/indexeconomic.aspx> to feature examples of economic impact studies that demonstrate the value of conservation and outdoor recreation. The Green Space Alliance in southeast Pennsylvania has completed an economic impact study of parks and open space in November that will serve as a model for other regions to follow. However, there remains an ongoing need to conduct research on the economic as well as the health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Goal 2: This goal strives to Reconnect People to the Outdoors through the seven recommendations and 31 action steps listed to broaden outdoor recreation opportunities statewide.

Communities partnering with local governments are re-developing abandoned industrial lands and creating green spaces for community gathering and outdoor education and enjoyment. Programs like WalkWorks and Smart Transportation are educating children about healthful outdoor activities as well as bringing communities together for outdoor events. There is still a need to provide opportunities in schools for students to experience outdoor



activities for education purposes as well as health benefits. This is a concern across the Commonwealth and entire country, and action is strongly urged to develop outdoor education and activities in the school setting.

Goal 3: There are six recommendations and 20 accompanying action steps to satisfy Goal 3 – Developing a Land and Water Trail Network.

Much work has already taken place or is currently taking place to develop such things as a one-stop trails website, uniform trail construction guidelines and funding criteria, and signage to aid water trail users. Many trail projects are rolling in towns and communities, and sharing these ideas is simply one of the best methods to ensure programs' success and growth. At the time of this Plan's one-year anniversary, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which was set up to develop and implement

A CALL TO ACTION *continued*

the plan, officially began organizing and laying plans for the statewide trails committee. The trails committee was convened for the first time during the November 2010 TAC gathering. Because trails are such a large part of recreation issues, it is necessary for trail experts and decision-makers to collaborate through such an inclusive assemblage. For example, an advocacy message on the value of trails is best developed and delivered by partner organizations across the state; and training on trail construction and maintenance may be a joint initiative between state government agencies and trail partners. This committee will be charged with carrying out a number of action items in the future and like the plan itself, the group's success is dependant upon an enthusiasm for the work, active participation and implementation of ideas/programs.

Goal 4: Many of the six recommendations and 20 action steps listed under Goal 4 – *Enhancing Outdoor Recreation through Better State Agency Cooperation* – are underway.

We are greening our grant programs, and holding regular meetings between DCNR and PennDOT to better align trail designs and discuss water trail signage. We are building marketing and economic incentives into our conservation landscape initiative work in places like South Mountain (Adams, Cumberland and Franklin counties) to protect orchards and forests. Most importantly, we continue to meet and are developing the three working committees on trails, health, and the outdoors called for in the Plan. Two recommendations that we



would like to see move forward that have not made much formal progress to date include providing more recreation opportunities for underserved urban and rural communities, and identifying collaborative opportunities among state and local agencies to share project planning, training, and project implementation and maintenance. These are priorities that outside groups are encouraged to pursue, including identifying good pilot projects.

This short list of accomplishments and unmet needs is only a beginning list. There may be other actions you're already working on that we don't know about, so let us know what's been happening to improve recreation in Pennsylvania. To post your own updates and success stories for others to see, go to the Plan's website at www.paoutdoorrecplan.com and we'll have even more stories to share in next year's update!



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